

In the Claims

Please amend the claims as follows.

Sub B1

1. (Amended) A system for sterilizing bottles, said bottles having an interior and exterior surface, comprising:

a source of a liquid sterilizing agent;

means for introducing said sterilizing agent onto the surface of said bottle in the form of discrete atomized liquid particles by contacting the bottle surface with said particles to form at least a thin liquid film thereon, present in sufficient concentration to substantially eliminate microbial contamination on the surface of said bottle after being in contact with said liquid film for a sufficient period of time; and

means for substantially removing said sterilizing agent from said bottle surface after said bottle is sterilized as desired.

A1

4. (Amended) The system of claim 3 wherein said sterilizing agent is introduced in a supersaturated fog to promote condensation of said particles onto the bottle surface.

Sub B2

16. (Amended) A method for sterilizing bottles, said bottles having interior and exterior surfaces, comprising:

introducing a sterilizing agent in the form of discrete atomized liquid particles onto the interior bottle surface;

contacting the interior bottle surface with said particles whereby said particles form a thin liquid film on the bottle surface;

Sub B2 maintaining the sterilizing agent on the surface of said bottle for a fixed period of time sufficient to reduce to a desired level the amount of active microorganisms on said surface; and

A3 removing said sterilizing agent from substantially all the interior and exterior surfaces after said surfaces are sterilized as desired.

A4 19. (Amended) The method of claim 18 wherein said sterilizing agent is introduced in a supersaturated fog to promote condensation of said particles onto the interior bottle surface.

Sub B3 29. (Amended) An apparatus for sterilizing bottles, said bottles having interior and exterior surfaces, comprising:

a source of a liquid sterilizing agent in the form of atomized liquid particles; at least one nozzle for introducing said sterilizing agent onto the surface of the bottle in the form of discrete atomized liquid particles by contacting the bottle surface with said particles to form at least a thin liquid film thereon, present in sufficient concentration to substantially eliminate microbial contamination on the surfaces of said bottle in contact with said liquid film; and

a rinsing device for substantially removing said sterilizing agent from said bottle surfaces after said bottle is sterilized as desired.

REMARKS

Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration and continued examination of this application, particularly in view of the following remarks. After entry of the present amendments, claims 1-40 are pending in this application.